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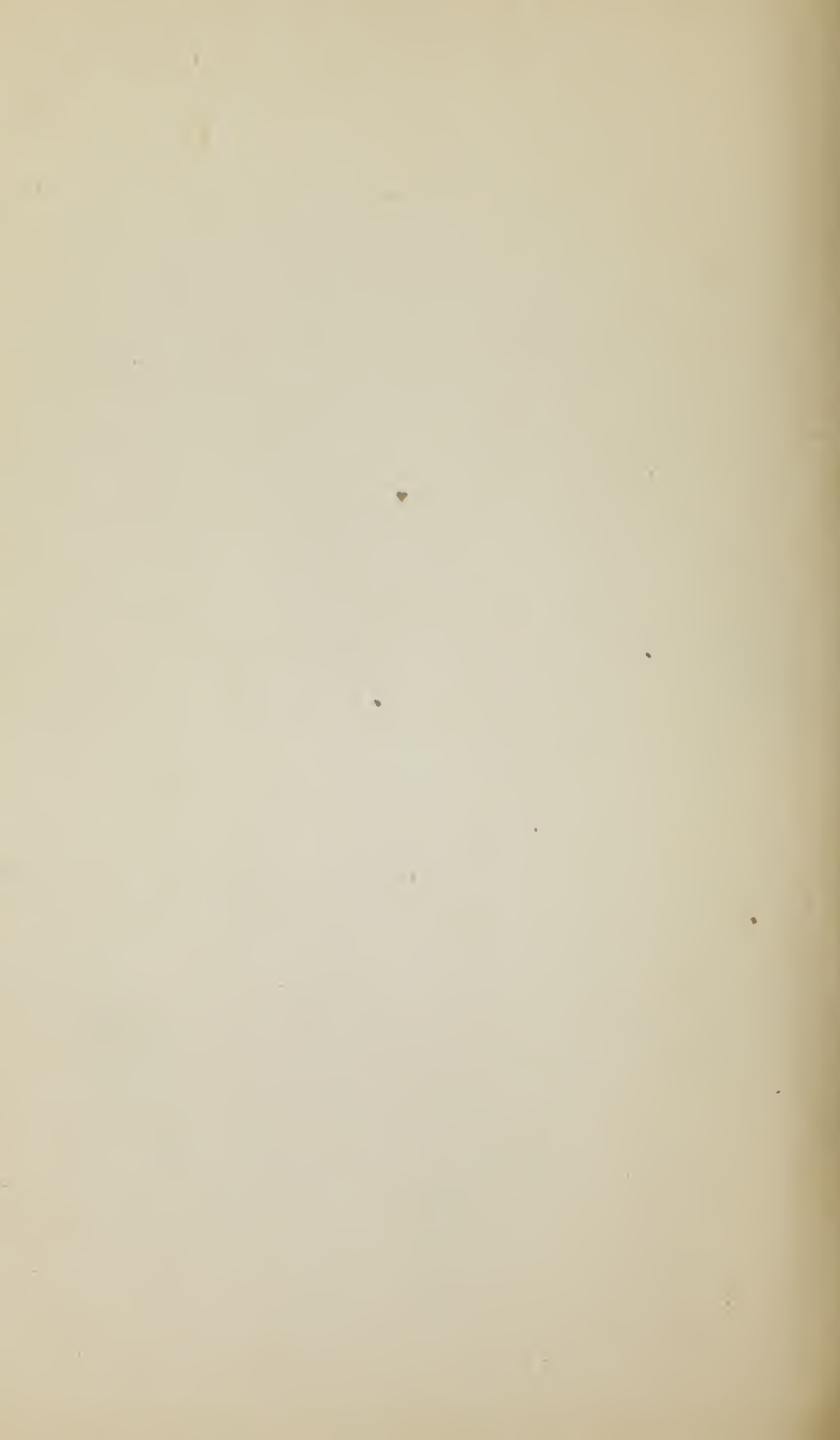
PICTURE MAKING
IN THE STUDIO
by PHOTOGRAPHY
by H. P. ROBINSON

THE SCOVILL & ADAMS COMPANY,
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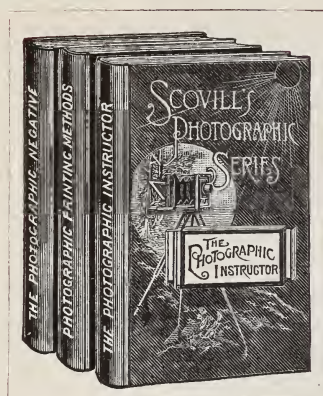
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Illustrating Chapter III.

"MEDORA."

Picture Making

IN THE

Studio

BY PHOTOGRAPHY,

WITH SUPPLEMENTARY CHAPTERS ON THE BUSINESS OF
PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHY AND INDIVIDUALITY
IN PHOTOGRAPHY.

BY

H. P. Robinson,

Author of "Pictorial Effect in Photography," "Letters on
Landscape Photography," etc., etc., etc.

"Dost Thou love Pictures? We will fetch them straight;
As lively Painted as the deed was done."

—*Shakespeare.*

NEW YORK :
THE SCOVILL & ADAMS COMPANY.

1892.



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PUBLISHERS' PREFACE.

THE following chapters on "PICTURE-MAKING IN THE STUDIO" and the one entitled the BUSINESS OF PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHY originally appeared in the pages of *The Photographic Times* (the latter, under a different title), for which magazine they were expressly written by their eminent author. The supplementary chapter on INDIVIDUALITY IN PHOTOGRAPHY was first given to the public as a lecture, and was read before the Photographic Convention of the United Kingdom of Great Britain in the summer of 1892. It also was published in *The Photographic Times*, and is reprinted here with the other chapters, as its subject-matter is of an appropriate nature. The proofs have been revised and corrected, with additions, by the author

NEW YORK, December, 1892.

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"MEDORA," BY RALPH W. ROBINSON.



PICTURE-MAKING IN THE STUDIO.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

JUDGING from the results that come before me, particularly in the illustrations published in the photographic journals, studio picture-making is as much practised in America as landscapes or outdoor figure composition. And, if I may be allowed to state my opinion freely, the success, in what may be called the higher walks, does not seem commensurate with the evident ambition, careful study, knowledge, and industry of those who attempt them. It is easy to see that this partial want of success is not so much from deficiency of ability as, if I am not mistaken, from working in the wrong direction. More is expected and attempted than the nature of the art will permit, and

the limits of our art have not been recognized. I will endeavor to explain more fully what I mean.

Picture-making in the studio is a very limited subject. There is a good deal to be done, but very little of which anything of definite value can constructively be said. It is true that much might be written on what at a first glance appears to belong to the subject, but that depends upon what you will agree to include under the much-abused word picture. For my part I draw the line rather high. I will admit a good deal of making-up, but in our present state of artistic education we are bound to exclude palpable sham, and all the make-believe we attempt must be so near the truth as not to be distinguished from that tyrannous dweller in the well. This at one blow does away with outdoor scenes manufactured in the studio; painted backgrounds, except in a slight degree; moulded rocks; boats on canvas sands, or carpet; miniature masts, and sham swings. All these may be very well, and very useful in the ordinary business of portraiture—until the public will put up with them no longer—saving the operator much trouble in posing, and unfortunately, at present, pleasing the average sitter. I say unfortunately because it is depressing, in the present state of advanced

general education, that such things give satisfaction. They do not belong to the higher art.

More than usual depends on the choice of subjects ; we should attempt only what we can perform. Great attempts do not always excuse failures, and wise ambition should take the direction of a determination to execute a simple subject perfectly, rather than on the choice of a complex theme altogether unsuited to the art.

It is better to save time by admitting at once that there are some subjects altogether beyond us. This must have been evident to all unprejudiced artistic minds, for several years, in the results of the principal competitions at your conventions. I have admired the enthusiasm and energy with which some of your photographers have attacked these gigantic essays. Knowing the difficulties in the way, I have even been surprised at the comparative excellence of the results ; they show great knowledge of composition and *chiaro-oscuro*, and all that goes to the making of successful pictures, except that saving knowledge which recognizes that a subject is beyond your powers, or not fitted to the resources of your art.

If you will consider over all those photographs that have pleased you most from an art point of view, you will find—and, if you have not thought over the subject before, it will sur-

prise you—that the best pictures, those you have considered the greatest triumphs of our art, have been of the simplest description. An unsuitable subject may surprise by its daring, excite wonder by its mere size, and admiration by its display of art power, but these emotions are of the moment only, they don't last—and then comes the feeling of insincerity, and the whole wonderful castle in the air dissolves, it has no substantial basis. Your admiration may have been captured by the display of skill, and your sympathies won by the evident earnest effort, but you soon feel the fraud. The artist may call his picture Henry VIII., in the catalogue, and it may look like that much-married monarch, but when the spectator comes to his senses he says to himself, "Why, that is only Tommy Johnson from the theatre, after all."

But we are not without resources. We have the consolation of knowing that so great an artist as Sir Joshua Reynolds says that "art in its perfection is not ostentatious." I should be sorry to infer from this wise saying that therefore the greatest art is the most lowly, but it is certain that very great art has been shown in most humble subjects. A good picture of a simple subject is an infinitely higher work of art than a mediocre historical picture, and it is a question whether some of the Dutch masters

did not show as much art—as art—in their tavern scenes as was shown by Raphael in his “Holy Families,” or Titian in his mythological paintings. However that may be, it is certain that there are a great variety of subjects open to limited means of art such as photography affords, and the sooner we recognize our limits the more time we shall have to work within them. I am aware that there are those of quite a different opinion, who say, with Lord Lyndhurst, that “a difficulty is a thing to be overcome,” and there can be no objection to those who care to make experiments to try to widen the limits to which our appliances seem to confine us, but in my mind it is better at present to try to reach as near perfection as possible well within our boundaries. It will be time enough to slay the giants after your weapons have been well proved on something less gigantic.

Photography is a real thing, and although it is not always bound down to literal fact, there is not much room in it for that “artistic license” which used to excuse any vagary of the painter. Its subjects should be selected from the incidents of our own time, but if we depart from them let there be no false pretense. If we represent a lady in a Greek dress call it frankly a lady in a Greek dress and not Aspasia. She does not live now, and you cannot photograph her—al-

though it is just possible spiritualists may not agree with me.

The age of sham is over. We no longer delight in a thing because it is not what it pretends to be. In our houses we have ceased to take pleasure in the imitation of marbles in our wall papers, or in the delusion of grained doors, however near its imitation may be to wood; we are educated beyond caring for wax flowers, however much more beautiful they may be than nature, and stuffed birds have been relegated to the hats and bonnets of those ladies who have so little taste as to wear them. In photography seas and skies taken by sunlight, and printed in greenish-blue autotype, no longer satisfy the cultivated mind as a substitute for moonlight. The legend, "All affectation is bad," should be written up large in the studio. Affectation and insincerity are at a discount, and laboriously built-up mongrel scenes, professing to represent subjects from poetry or history, pall on the taste, and leave a sickening sense of unreality of vision and a too great actuality of make-believe.

Not but what a great deal of talent may be shown in these mistaken attempts. In the convention pictures to which I have alluded, I have been astonished at the excellence of conception, fertility of invention, evidence of re-

search, and control of composition and light and shade, the apt selection and drilling of models, the industrious manufacture of costumes, and the laborious industry of their producers ; but the effect on the mind is that which similar mistaken efforts had on Dr. Johnson, who wished that they were not only difficult, but impossible.

The artists who produced these well-intended, if mistaken, pictures are capable of better things, but they must get down off their stilts. I give some of them credit that they felt guilty over the work, and only did it because those subjects were selected for them to exercise their undoubted abilities on in competition for prizes.

I wish the convention authorities could be induced to offer good prizes for simple subjects more within the reach of the photographer, but not to indicate any particular subject. General directions may be given, but the choice and invention—a not unimportant part of the whole—should be left to the photographer. It is very desirable that this kind of picture should be encouraged. I am not sufficiently acquainted with the picturesque life of America to make definite suggestions. In England we have fine old cottages and other buildings that are the delight of the artist. They are, unfortunately, fast disappearing, but sufficient

remain to furnish themes for many pictures. Rooms with immense fireplaces, with ingle nooks, blackened rafters, diamond-paned windows, and old-fashioned furniture. Not, perhaps, particularly comfortable or healthy to live in, but admirable material for the artist.

I do not know if you have anything similar in the land that knows not ruin or decay, but surely there must be some interior subjects that would afford scope for artistic treatment and picturesque effect. Mothers and children are to be found everywhere in all grades of life, and give opportunity for illustrating the whole range of feeling; old men are not scarce; dogs and other animals are always ready to give a motive, and I have seen a quantity of excellent photographs from your side in which the irrepressible "nigger" was the prevailing and most adequate characteristic.

I am afraid that the photographer must be guided, in some measure, in the choice of his subjects by the models and accessories at his command, somewhat after the manner in which Nicholas Nickleby had to regulate his dramas to the resources of the company and to include the real pump and washing tubs that Mr. Crummles had bought a bargain. It is not my business here to suggest subjects. I am not presumptuous enough to attempt to try to teach

the art of imagination. New ideas, or what are called new ideas, are often thought to be the suggestions of sudden inspiration, but they are more ordinarily evolved from antecedent facts or surrounding circumstances, and the photographer may feel sure that the more practice his imagination has the more fertile will it be.





CHAPTER II.

HOW A STUDIO PICTURE WAS CONCEIVED AND EXECUTED.

I WILL now proceed to describe the production of a picture which may be remembered by some of the readers of *The Photographic Times*, a small photogravure reproduction of it having been published in its pages about three years ago. It was called "Dawn and Sunset." A wise artist should never ostentatiously describe the details of the putting together of his picture. Analysis takes away the attention from the effect, and fixes it on the mechanism, and his efforts should be directed to hiding the mechanism and showing the effect. Not that he should keep secrets, or pretend to have any, but simply that description defeats his one object, which should be to delight his spectator with his subject, his

art and his skill. But a full description of this picture will tell pretty well all I know of "how to make pictures in a studio," and it may be worth the sacrifice.

Walking down a country lane on a fine April morning, I met a very old man, bent with years and labor, and supporting himself with two sticks. He was dressed in one of the picturesque smock-frocks that have now almost disappeared from our rural life. He had a grand head and was altogether one of the best subjects I had seen. I felt an absolute compulsion to make a picture of him. In my mind's eye I at once saw him sitting in his cottage brooding over a dying fire emblematical of the end. I at once engaged him, to his great satisfaction, and had him to my studio, where I made a few preliminary studies. The next proceeding was to make several small rough sketches of subjects, utilizing the old man. All of these included a young child as a contrast to the ancient model. From these were evolved an idea and a design that pleased me, and appeared to be within the possibilities of the material at my command. From the small sketch was now made a tolerably finished drawing in charcoal, of the size of the proposed picture, 32 inches by 22, and this size was determined by the size of my camera, 23 by 17.

In this sketch was shown the scheme of light and shade I desired, and the position of every object. I may here remark that although a large size suited this particular subject, it is a mistake to make a large picture because you happen to have a big camera. Different subjects seem to demand different dimensions as well as proportions. In art there is nothing great in bigness. Greatness in art can be packed into a small space. Meissonier put more art into a few inches than many painters put into acres. Some even argue that as much art may be crowded into a photograph the size of a postage stamp as could be painted on the side of a house. But these are enthusiasts.

A description of the completed subject may aid the memory and facilitate the explanation of the building-up of the picture.

The scene is the interior of a cottage, showing a large fireplace, and a window to the left. The window is the principal source of light, but not the only one, as I shall presently show. A very old man is sitting over the fire brooding over the past. At least that is the idea intended to be conveyed. Nearer the window in the fuller light, sits a young mother with a baby in her arms which she has prepared for the cradle beside her. The child is not asleep, and although a small part of the face only is visible

it may be seen that it is answering its mother's smile. The principal light is from the window on the left, and a faint glow comes from the waning fire.

It may, perhaps, puzzle some of my readers to know how the size of a picture 32 x 22 was controlled by the size of a camera 23 x 17. It must be recollected that a picture of this kind could not be taken on one plate. There were several reasons which made it imperative to take it in portions. A plate the full size would, of course, not have been impossible, but besides considerations of focus, it would be leaving too much to chance to get all the figures quite right at the same time. Nothing should be left to chance, and by taking the figures separately more attention could be paid to each group, while the difficulty of printing them together was not worth a thought.

The sketch having been made to the minutest detail, there remained a great deal of trouble but no difficulty in carrying it out. I had no spare studio suitable to the work, and therefore had to build one. This was made principally of Willesden paper (a very convenient material for temporary buildings), the size about 30 x 15 feet. The end showing the fireplace and windows was built up solidly with bricks and mortar, and the chimney of wood.

The necessity for a chimney sufficient to carry away smoke will be seen presently. The scene was now arranged and every little detail as shown in the sketch attended to. Too much study cannot be given to this part of the work, and the end of much study should be the absence of evidence of any study at all. Or rather to the ordinary spectator the effect should be that of chance, but the educated artist would see (and admire if properly done) that all apparent chance was the result of trained direction ;

“ All chance direction which thou canst not see ;
All discord harmony not understood,”

but which has its effect on the completed result. It is not necessary to interpolate here an essay on the art of composition. One great object in arranging the subject should be to save the models. Nothing should be left to arrange after the model is placed. This is a rock on which photographers stumble. Sitters for portraits often become weary while the photographer is fussing over some unimportant detail that may have been seen to previously. Make it a rule to never waste your model.

Pictures of the kind we have now before us are often spoilt by the injudicious use and crowding of accessories. The ease with which objects full of intricate detail are rendered in photography is a great temptation to overload the

scene. It should be remembered that the difficulty to be overcome is exactly opposite to that of the painter. The latter knowing the labor required to give detail or finish, endeavors to persuade himself and the public that it is creditable and clever to avoid elaboration, takes refuge in impressionism and tells you the picture is finished when he has done with it. If you cannot understand it and don't like it, and want to be civil, you cover your retreat with the word "suggestive." On the other hand the photographer's difficulty is to suppress, and subordination is one of the least manageable features of his art, and should be carefully studied; not so much because it is a difficulty as that your work will have very little of art quality if it is without that essential character.

In collecting accessories it is of consequence to think of the tone, and its effect on the *chiaro-oscuro* as well as the form. It would have been destructive of all harmony, for instance, if a clean, white-margined engraving had been placed over the fireplace; if the jug on the table had unduly attracted the eye, or the flowers in the window had been too obtrusive. In the apparently small matter of the wicker cradle in the foreground I had a good deal of trouble. In all the shops I could find nothing but those made of nearly white peeled willow. I had,

therefore, to get one especially made of the natural twigs with the bark on. This was not departure from nature, as this kind is often used by the poorer classes.

A word must now be said of the lighting of the group. It is quite clear that, even if it admitted sufficient light for photographic purposes, if the light were obtained from one small window only, the effect must be hard and full of violent contrasts. An expedient, therefore, must be found for softening the shadows. It would not be straining nature too much to imagine that the cottage had another window or open door. To put this into practice the end of the studio opposite the scene was taken out and the arrangement was found to produce the desired amount of softness. Then measures had to be taken for the firelight, a very slight effect, but which, I think, greatly adds to the completeness and naturalness of the picture. It could have been greatly increased, but there was the danger of a vulgar, clap-trap effect. To show the naked fire would not have been desirable, or, indeed, at that time, possible, and therefore a chair over the back of which hung a towel—not a white one—was placed before it. The source of light was a large pill-box full of pyrotechnic composition, stuck full of bits of magnesium ribbon, and fired by an

assistant at the moment of exposure. The flash-light was not invented at that time. The open chimney saved any difficulty with the smoke.

Everything being ready it is time to introduce the models. We began with the old man, and he being very easy was soon done with. It is not worth while going into the photographic details except, perhaps, to say that the lens was Dallmeyer's 7 D, the camera home-made of deal, at the cost of thirty shillings, the exposure 35 seconds, and that four plates were exposed. Not that more than one was really required, but I like to have duplicates in case of accidents. Now came the difficulty. The baby, in all groups, if awake, is always the weak link in the chain. I won't enter into any account of the trouble I had in getting the right baby, or the many half-crowns I paid as compensation—or as consolation—to disappointed mothers who brought their treasures for inspection, only to be rejected as unsuitable. The mother was easier, and had had some experience in posing, and knew exactly how to take my orders. I ought to have mentioned that to take this half of the picture the camera had to be swung round a little. Scientific purists, who are the bane of art, would delight in proving that altering the position of the camera would upset the truth of perspective,

to which I can only reply that I don't care ; that there is no want of truth that the eye can detect, and that I don't supply measuring rules to the spectators of my pictures.

It would have been easy to put the child to sleep, but I had made up my mind that she should show an answering smile to the mother. Another smaller point was to contrast the little hand of the child with that of the woman. The first and second exposures were failures through moving. He only knows who is photographing a baby on a costly plate what an infinity of time there is in thirty-five seconds! However, out of ten exposures I got two negatives which fairly satisfied me.

While the two sides of the picture were being taken the cradle was not wanted, and was removed out of the way. It was now replaced and a separate negative made of it. If it had been taken with the mother and child it would have been hopelessly out of focus. The picture, therefore, consists of three separate negatives ; the old man and background as far as the inside of the chimney jamb ; the mother and child, including the window and background, and the cradle.

I am afraid I have gone wearisomely into details, and I also fear I have robbed my picture of any of the mystery that it may have contain-

ed, but I should greatly prefer to see some simple subjects of this kind carried out instead of impossible Elaines and Hiawathas.





CHAPTER III.

PORTRAITS THAT ARE PICTURES.

BESIDES the simple kind of rustic picture described in the last chapter there are other classes of subjects which may be legitimately produced in the studio. Any picturesque subject the action of which takes place indoors is, of course, quiet suitable. This includes a very wide range of incidents too indefinite to be clearly stated. It is not necessary that interiors should always be rustic interiors; indoor scenes may range from the humble kitchen of a cottage to the ceremonial salons of a palace.

A portrait should occasionally become a picture as well as a likeness. I am bound to qualify this statement, however, by the word occasionally, because it is not every, or, indeed, many sitters, coming to us in the ordinary course of business, that bring with them the

possibilities of picture-making. Portrait painters differ greatly in the effect they give to their works. Did anybody ever see a portrait by Rembrandt that was not a picture, or one by some popular portraitist of the present day that was? Sir Joshua Reynolds differed from most painters in this respect. He may be said to have made all his portraits pictures and all his pictures portraits. He never painted a portrait that was not interesting apart from any interest in the original, and he never painted a picture that was not a direct representation of a sitter before him. His wonderful "Puck" sitting on a toadstool; his "Infant Hercules Strangling the Serpents" were direct portraits of children, and in his "Holy Family" the virgin is just a portrait of a simple English village maiden and nothing more. No painter is more worthy of study by the photographer who wishes to make pictures of his portraits than Reynolds. He could even make a pictorial arrangement of a portrait group, which may be taken as a supreme test of skill in an artist. His children are simply wonderful, and not one of them (color apart) beyond the reach of the appliances of photography, although they may be at present beyond the skill of photographers. Their merit is attained by utmost simplicity, happy expression, and effective light and shade. There is no

straining after effect, and many of his children—the delightful Miss Bowles, for instance—look straight at the artist, an effect that some writers would persuade us is scarcely permissible. In looking over prints of many of his pictures of children it will be seen that he concentrates the light on the upper part of the figure by the use of what some would call false shadows. And it is true that it would take a good deal of subtle argument to explain the matter-of-fact existence of some of these shadows; but what beauty they add to the effect! And is not the attainment of beauty a sufficient excuse for a little straining of fact?

Photography is the truthful art, but why should we always hamper ourselves with hard facts? If everything is fair in love and war, why should it not be so in art? But I must insist on success to justify doubtful means. The same law of license should allow us to use painted backgrounds. We have taken that liberty, indeed, from very early days, and, unfortunately, seldom done it well, but of late years there has been great improvement in this matter, and you have shown us the way in America. It requires a good artist to make nature and art amalgamate, and not even great skill can always prevent incongruity. Here is an example in a sister art. For several years we have had

an excellent dramatic company acting Shakespeare's plays in the open air, often in what appeared to be appropriate natural scenery. For instance, a fine bit of old forest was used for the sylvan scenery in "As You Like It." Here we were getting closer to nature than was possible on the boards. Here was the Forest of Arden itself with *Rosalind* and *Celia*, *Touchstone* and *Audry*, and *Orlando*, all true to life as near as imitation would go, but the natural scenery did not harmonize with the artificial figures and words. The half nature half art was a mistake. The effect should have "palpitated with actuality," but the feeling on the spectator was that of a very real sham. And when *Amiens*, surrounded by the company, had to sing about "Winter and rough weather" in very real rain, as sometimes happened, the audience under their umbrellas, as well as the actors, plainly felt that realism is not always cheerful art. A painted background, unless excellently done, has something of the same effect on the artistic feelings, the incongruity is palpable. But if ever painted backgrounds were allowable they would be such simple ones as those in Sir Joshua's pictures, and especially in those of his children.

I may as well take this opportunity of saying that I cannot tell you much you do not

appear to know and practise in child portraiture. If I, who only see that of your work which comes over here, may presume to say so, American photographers are to be congratulated on their portraits of children. It is better as a rule, than we do here.

If we admit the artificial, there are ways of combining natural objects with painted ones that, however they may be very properly condemned in an exhibition of true photography, would, nevertheless, make pleasing pictures. I mean combining a real foreground, "all agrowing and ablowing," on a platform in the studio backed by a painted landscape. A picturesque foreground may be made upon a platform of rocks, logs of wood, tufts of grass, ferns, heath and wild flowers, which could easily be kept growing and in good condition by a little attention. Care should be taken to use a background without linear perspective, and that the light falls on the figure from the same direction as it appears to do on the painted screen. The platform may be placed on castors or small wheels for the convenience of rolling it about the studio. Of course in this kind of picture the delicate refinements of art must not be expected. It is not possible, for example, to light a figure in a studio exactly as it appears out-of-doors. A still better effect is produced if, instead of the painted

screen, a suitable background is added from nature by double printing. This is easily done. The background behind the figure for this purpose should be plain white, or with a very slight darkening delicately gradated towards the bottom, or it should be stopped out with black varnish, which method, however, should be avoided if possible, it being difficult to prevent a hard, cut-out effect. As I intend to have a chapter on combination printing I need not pursue the subject further at present.

There is a class of fancy subject which may be carried out without any great impropriety, although it borders on the kind I have denounced as not proper to our art. This class is represented in the frontispiece, which is from a photograph by my son, Ralph W. Robinson. I have selected it because it comes nearest to some of the Elaine pictures of last year, and yet, I think, does not shock our sense of fitness as some of them do. It does not pretend to say much, therefore there is no glaring violation of truth; there is no anachronism because it does not pretend to represent any period or any country; there is no departure from historical accuracy because it does not pretend to be an historical event. It is just a "subject" used as a vehicle for the expression of a sense of beauty in line and tone. It represents a girl

of our own time polishing a shield, but it is, I think, as near the realization of an abstraction as we can get with our realistic materials. It may be of to-day or of any time, but it does not ask you to believe that it is of any other time than the present. There is a name given to the picture—Medora—but that is only to distinguish it from others. The name may mean anything or nothing, yet I think it is a mistake. It is not Conrad's "Medora"—he did not possess a shield for her to polish—but that is the unfortunate young person the name suggests to the ordinary reader of poetry. The subject is, as I have said, simply a convenient vehicle for beauty of line and effect, and such subjects I hold are lawful in our art. The figure has the serious fault of being too large for the space, and, like photographs taken with a very long focus lens giving a narrow angle, seems to have been cut out of the centre of a picture.

In all methods which allow an artist liberty there are possibilities of going wrong, and therefore more openings afforded for the abuse of the enemy as well as the inamadverson of friends. Neither combination printing nor the production of subject pictures should be undertaken without something more than a superficial knowledge of nature. In art a little knowledge is a dangerous thing; in critics it is

want of knowledge that leads to so much intolerance in art. Leslie said that "those who are best acquainted with nature are always the most ready to tolerate the faults of great masters," and the superficial are not always able to see that

"The light that led astray
Was light from Heaven."





CHAPTER IV.

PRINTING.

SOME time ago I had a packet of photographs sent to me to judge for a provincial exhibition. Among them were two prints which at first glance appeared to be exactly alike, but at a second look the one appeared much better than the other. A still closer inspection showed that an additional figure had been added to the group. The one print represented a group of three picturesque little boys drinking from their hands at a well. The motive was admirable, the figures intent on what they were doing and forgetting the camera, but the experienced eye at once felt that there was something wanting, a vacancy, a "space to let," in the picture. By no means a model picture except in a feeble class. The second print had been taken from the same negative, but what a difference! A

fourth boy had been unobtrusively added, and the group was complete, soul-satisfying, perfect. There were no other contributions to the class and therefore no competition, but I had no hesitation in recommending it for the highest award.

The combination was so perfect that the present writer, an old hand at this kind of work, was not certain how it was done, and wrote to the artist for information. He received the reply, with many undeserved compliments, that it was all to be found in his own writings. But the photographer had "bettered the instruction," and I was glad to see the method carried so far as to puzzle myself, and confess that I should like to have to wonder oftener.

Combination printing is useful to the picture maker both inside and outside of the studio, and in this chapter I shall not confine myself entirely in-doors.

The time is gone by when any apology is necessary for this method of printing, although it has been fiercely attacked in the past, and even now gets a few feeble kicks—for the sake of consistency, perhaps—from those who have ceased to disbelieve in, and sometimes use it.

Before we go into practical details it may be worth while to enumerate some of its uses and advantages.

It enables the photographer to do what would otherwise be impossible.

It has banished blank white skies from English photographs, and will, I hope, dismiss them from all landscape photographs as knowledge of nature increases, and the love of art spreads.

It enables the landscape photographer to correct the errors of nature by giving him some command over composition. There are those who insist that "nature cannot err," but that is simply a plausible saying not in the least understood by those who superficially use it, and is, like many of our proverbs, which are supposed to be the essence of truth, very misleading. The artist must look upon nature as his raw material for making pictures. She is not an artist herself; she never selects, never composes. Art, on the contrary, selects, restrains, composes, is emphatic or reticent; while the prodigality and carelessness of nature is evident. Nature is always lovely, and yet careless about her looks. It is the province of the artist to condense her and make her presentable. Nature does not always choose the best sky as a background to set forth her charms; the skilful photographer can select a sky which, while being perfectly natural, will agree in line and tone with the landscape, improve the general effect, and convince the behold-

er that the work was the result of skill instead of accident. Then what *is* nature? Is it telegraph poles, telephone wires, factory chimneys? Nature does not care how these ugly evidences of civilization cut across her skies: the photographer, if he is an artist, does.

It enables the photographer to correct the difficulties of focus. The eye adapts itself instantaneously to all planes so that to the healthy eye all nature is practically in focus at once. There are reasons why we have to dodge this a little in art, and usually slightly favor the foreground, but there are cases in which no amount of excusing the shortcomings of the fixed lens (which, unlike the eye, has no muscles of accommodation) will do. If, for instance, the photographer wishes to take a group of large figures with a landscape background—a favorite class of subjects with painters and one becoming increasingly popular with photographers—he finds that if his figures are in focus his distance is blurred beyond recognition. Now no conscientious artist can stand this. His way out is through combination printing, which allows him to pay separate attention to the separate planes.

It often happens, even in these sharp-shooting days, that part of a group taken in a studio requires undivided attention. The baby or the

dog is often the weak link in the chain, and may be photographed separately and added to the group.

It would be of little service to go on piling up further instances of the use of this method of printing, let it be sufficient to say that it enlarges the limits of the art; and is the only means of getting many subjects that would otherwise be impossible in photography.

I may, perhaps, also be allowed to add that it is a splendid thing for the critic (who ought to be more grateful than he is) when "gravelled for lack of matter." It gives him the speculative chance of saying the lighting is all wrong without the photographer having a good demonstrative reply, except, indeed, the critic mistakes, as he has been known to do, a single-plate picture for a combination, and then the combination printer gets his opportunity. And so the world goes round.

I will now endeavor to give a few simple directions for the management of a few simple subjects, and after he has accomplished these the operator will find the method easily adaptable in many ways.

The principle of combination printing is easily stated. It is the printing of as much only as is required from several negatives on one sheet of paper.

The simplest form is that by which a sky is added to a landscape. This is now almost universally practised, but as a rule much more trouble is taken with it than is necessary. An exact mask is sometimes made of the landscape and laid on the sky. This method produces a hard line, and is not so effective as vignetting.

The landscape negative should have a dense sky. If not sufficiently opaque to leave the paper white when the foreground is printed it must be stopped out. This is best done with black varnish. The varnish should be applied at the back of the plate, thus securing a softer edge. It may be applied with a brush close up to objects with definite edges, and used more loosely round the edges of such objects as trees. The finger will be useful in dabbing the pigment in a vignetting manner into difficult places, and sometimes large spaces may be left to mingle with the clouds, but this requires great judgment. It is not always necessary to stop out small spaces between branches, as they usually develop more densely than broad expanses. Sometimes a thin film of color is required to slightly lighten a passage vignetted at the edges; this is easily accomplished by diluting the varnish with turpentine, and equalizing and softening off with a badger-hair brush, such as is used by painters for softening skies.

When a print is taken the sky space will, of course, be plain white. Now take a suitable cloud negative, and in the printing adjust the print so that it shall fall in its proper place, and expose to light. During exposure the landscape part should be covered by black velvet or a suitable mask. This mask must *not* be cut to fit the outlines of the landscape, a mistake often made, and the result leads to instant detection. The mask should be moved during printing so as to gently vignette the sky into the view.

Care should be taken that the sky is not printed so dark as to appear to come in front of the landscape—a common fault—or that dark portions of clouds come over light passages in the landscape, such as distant hills. Light portions of sky may be printed over dark parts with impunity.

The sky negative used should be very thin. If it is a strong sky the shadows of the clouds should be transparent. They are best taken on slow plates; those used for transparencies are very good, the exposure from half a second at midday to two or three seconds for stormy sunsets. I have been using lately slow isochromatic plates exposed through a yellow screen, and find them excellent. I seldom recommend anything but pyro as a developer, but for skies

I prefer hydroquinone, for just the quality that makes this developer less useful for landscapes and portraiture, hardness.

Of course this method is open to abuses. A sky may be selected out of all harmony and truth with the landscape, but if the photographer will be absurd let the punishment fall on his own head and not on the process.

Another example, easy to understand, will be that of a three-quarter figure with a natural landscape distance. The figure should be taken before a white background, or all but the figure should be stopped out with black varnish, keeping the edges as soft as possible, and a print taken on matt paper. Albumenized may be used, but is less manageable. The figure now should be carefully cut out and laid on its place on the landscape negative. This will stop out all of it that is not required. A print should now be made of the figure and afterwards carefully adjusted on the landscape, taking care that the printed figure falls exactly on the mask. This is not so difficult to do as may appear to the reader, and if large numbers are required register marks may be made on the corners of the plates, enabling the printer to make the adjustment without trouble.

The artistic effect will be greatly increased

if the landscape negative is *very slightly* out of focus.

When the first print comes off it should be carefully inspected, and the joinings may be greatly improved by cutting away portions of the mask, in dark parts and substituting varnish on the back. This is especially useful where a light bit of background comes behind a dark portion of the figure.

Excellent effects may be produced by photographing a full-length figure standing on a suitable foreground and adding a landscape.

To make a very small addition to a picture, or to work out a large group it is only necessary to play variations on the very simple method just described. In making a large group as many figures as possible should be obtained on each negative, and the positions of the joinings so contrived that they shall be least noticed. The skilful combination printer will often deceive the eye of an expert, and lead him to look in the wrong place for the line of junction.





CHAPTER V.

THE BUSINESS OF PORTRAIT PHOTOGRAPHY.

AT the beginning of a new year it may be worth while inquiring how we now stand. To begin with : How is business? If we are to believe the pessimists, professional photography has been going to the dogs for many years, for so long a time, in fact, that it seems to be a very slow process, and portraiture still flourishes.

It is usual to explain the falling away of photography as a trade by saying that luxuries have to be given up before necessities, and that photographs are luxuries ; yet those who are fond of dark sayings hold that at this end of the century our chiefest necessities are our luxuries.

However that may be, or whether photographs are a necessity or a luxury, it is certainly true that more photographs are produced than ever. Unfortunately the doers have in-

creased out of all proportion. In America, if we may believe little hints of evidence, the business is still very good. Several of your periodicals sometimes publish photographs sent them by portraitists, and in giving an account of their pictures they often excuse their shortcomings by saying something to this effect: "She willingly consented to pose for me, and in a very short time I had secured the negatives required. *There were many people waiting for sittings*, and I had not time to give the matter special study."

It would interest English photographers to hear if this is so always with you. Are your waiting-rooms always full of expectant sitters? Our photographers either make their appointments better, or their business has fallen away, for it is very rare to find more than one or two sitters waiting. That merry time has gone by. The real danger to photography as a high-class business is the increasing ease of a process which, for ordinary work, does not require more skill than is looked for in any other trade, and the push for business seems likely to make it forgotten as an art altogether.

It has been the fashion here to attribute all of our misfortunes to the spread of amateur photography. I have never held this view, and I notice a phase in amateur trading—for they

do trade—that will be distinctly good for professional photographers, and indeed will do somewhat to save them from themselves. Competition in the profession has reduced prices until there are photographers who will take your portrait for nothing on the chance of selling you a frame. This is, of course, one of the agreeable swindles to which an innocent art has given birth, but there it is, and there are others almost as bad. Some of our amateurs are going on the other tack and asking, *and getting*, large prices for their work. Little account has been taken of late years of the artistic value of a photograph other than a portrait, and the price is usually decided by the size. Twenty-five cents for instance, is considered good value for a 10 x 8 landscape. But at least one of our amateurs now sells his prints of this size at \$5.00 each, and, moreover, finds customers. I cannot help thinking that instead of damaging the trade this worthy amateur is one of its greatest benefactors, for it is admitted by all that plenty of good photography is done, and that all that is the matter is the small amount paid for it. If the public could only be taught that they must pay for quality as well as quantity, quality would be more worth producing and all would be well. And, peradventure, a curiously unexpected result

may occur, as suggested in the words of an old professional friend, who said the other day that he was about to turn amateur, so that he may be able to sell his pictures better! I am glad to say I notice a decided tendency in the best portraitists to raise their prices, while common work, on the other hand, is cheaper than ever.

A great change has come over photographic printing, and this has afforded an opportunity—or rather a good excuse—for portraitists to raise their prices. Years ago, in the preface to a little book on “Silver Printing,” I said that silver printing had been often doomed, but it still survived. It survives still, but in a different form. The use of albumenized paper is dying out. If it were not for the obvious pun, I should say that the dyeing due to the makers has had a great deal to do with its death. The pearly tints of the dyes used at first to counteract the yellowing of the paper were “improved” into hideous mauves and pinks, the vulgarity of which could not last. Good things are often improved off the face of the earth for no other reason than for the sake of change. The place of albumenized paper has been partly taken by another form of silver printing, and nearly all the best photographers, when they do not use platinotype, make their portraits on matt paper,

toned with platinum, and in exhibitions silver printing in albumen is one of the lost arts. It still survives, however, in the production of cheap photographs, and for typographical work, when that work is not done by a still cheaper mechanical process.

Professionals suffer from cut-throat competition and the amateurs have their own violent rivalries. One form of the disease, with the latter, is the great craze for medals. I don't think they care much for the quality of them, either in the die-sinking or the metal. Gold, silver, or bronze, they all count. Neither do they care for the quality of their opponents in the competitions: the easier the victory the better.

A medal taken at a local Little Pedlington Exhibition is shown and worshipped as much as if it had been won in fair fight against all the talent of the Kingdom. Speaking of medals reminds me of a curious discovery as to the intrinsic value of some of them awarded in such profusion, which was made the other day by one of our amateurs. One day he wanted some silver nitrate in a hurry, and the nearest town was several miles away. Like Bernard Palissy, when he sacrificed his wife's wedding ring as a last resource in his experiments, he dissolved one of his silver medals—and found it contain-

ed a few pence-worth only of silver, the rest was alloy.

There is one matter in which we are certainly improving in the Old Country. We are decreasing the amount of retouching and increasing the quality of the little that is necessary. In the last London Exhibition—the worst we have had in some respects—it was delightful to see how glaringly dreadful some few conspicuous examples of what to avoid in retouching—the billiard-ball polish—looked in comparison with others in which the reticence of nature had been observed. The abuse of retouching is a fine example of a good thing gone wrong, and drives teachers to despair. It was an excellent corrective as at first used. There are, no doubt, defects of nature and the process combined which require removing, but when nature is refined off the face of mankind it is enough to make those who introduce a useful process tear their hair and sit in sackcloth and ashes. It did me good to read Mr. W. H. Sherman's vigorous attack on retouching in the first number of *The Photographic Times* for the year. In this I think the writer incidentally shows the cause of much of the bad work that disgraces our art. He describes a vulgarly over-retouched cabinet picture, and quotes the back of the mount, decorated of course with the palette and brushes

which the "proprietor" would not know how to use, together with the name of the "artist," finishing with this significant line: "*Branches in all the principal cities of the Union.*" This explains it. Much over-praised "enterprise" takes the place of art. How could this "art-photographer" be in many places at the same time? He is not a bird! Great artists are individuals, not companies. An artist is a person who does a certain kind of work, and it seems ridiculous to point out that the same person can be exercising his calling at one time in "all the principal cities in the Union." Art is the expression of a man's mind, and until it is recognized that it is the *man*, and not the *system*, that does the work, we cannot expect individuality or art. And in the matter of retouching we seldom find common sense.





SUPPLEMENTARY CHAPTER.

INDIVIDUALITY IN PHOTOGRAPHY.

IN a number of *Blackwood's Magazine* an ingenious writer tries to show that the one thing more than another that now represents primitive man is the baby, and that the nineteenth century British baby differs very little from the savage child of, let us say a couple of hundred thousand years ago, for the baby is nearly a quadruped, and is a reckless creature devoid of conscience. It is, perhaps, a knowledge of the fact that babies are all alike that enables photographers, as it is libellously said, to make the negative of one of the species satisfy the yearnings of many mothers. Now, photography certainly somewhat resembles this view of the human race in the respect that its immature productions are all alike, and it is not until they grow up and acquire a conscience or

soul that they differentiate and show individuality.

Of the immature there is no end, but a wise and invariable provision of nature checks overproduction. Nature is always wise, but has no mercy :

“So careful of the type she seems,
So careless of the single life ;”

and, seeing that the world would be overwhelmed by immature photographs, she sent beneficent fading to destroy them (always, as in other departments of nature, “so careful of the type,” sparing a few) until the art grew old enough to possess a soul or conscience, and then permanent methods were given to us ; and even now we sometimes feel inclined to paraphrase the wisdom of Mr. Whistler, and say modern photographs do not fade, and “therein lies their deep damnation.” This wonderful preservation of a few in all their pristine freshness is suggestive of a special providence, for according to the scientists, who are, of course, always right, like methods should produce like results, and not one of the old prints should have escaped.

Now, evidence of soul or conscience in a picture is art. Yet there are those who will not recognize that we have a soul, but, like Mr. Gilbert's mechanical figures in the *Mountebanks*, are only stuffed full of badly made

machinery that sometimes runs down, and always moves with a jerk ; and I am not sure we are not suspected of trying to adopt the "put a penny in the slot" business to the fine arts.

It is a favorite reproach with the opponents of photography as a picture-maker that its results are all alike ; it is one of the triumphant proofs of those who will not admit that photography is an art that the unthinking machine makes all its products to the same pattern ; that there is no intrinsic evidence in any photograph of its maker. They will no more believe the plainest evidence to the contrary than those of old would believe the angels. They say we are mechanical, and it is of no use pointing out that this wild assertion is obviously untrue ; we hear it over and over again, sometimes from one who knows that it is not true, at others from those who are simply ignorant and cannot learn. These latter are to be pitied. Then there are those whose purpose it serves to deny ; and, worst of all, those who have tried, and altered their faith because they failed, those who, as the poet says, "fade away, and dying damn." To the credit of photographers there have been very few of these ; however, we have lately had an exhibition of one of them. A most enthusiastic defender of photography as an art of a few years ago, but who, perhaps, failed to prove

it in his works, was politely asked to contribute to a recent exhibition, and is reported to have replied as follows—it is a lesson on the mutability of things to compare this letter with his former opinions: “I am fully persuaded that photography is not art nor can be, and to encourage exhibitions is to lead a lot of vain people to waste their time in the practice of a useless and vain pursuit.”

It has no effect with the prejudiced critic to point out, that if different minds using the same machines produced like results invariably, as machines are expected to do, any one of them who understood the machine ought to be able to turn out a series of masterpieces equal to the best that have ever been produced, always providing, of course, that one machine was as good and as well brass-bound and French-polished as the other. Yet they continue to object and this is one of the latest utterances of science: “The picture painted by the artist is a transcript of his own emotions, but a photograph is not a reflex of human emotions at all—unless, indeed, accidentally so—but is a direct reproduction of nature, and only through science the offspring of man.” We must be grateful to the writer for allowing us the accident.

I am quite ready to confess that up to a

certain point, and in the hands of the ninety per cent. of the followers of the art who are not artists, the photograph is in the process; but with others the picture is in the man (as in painting, only in a less degree, and as far as the materials will allow). The process takes a very subordinate place, and is dominated by the taste, thought, and feeling of the artist, when an artist uses it with what may be fairly called emotional results. Who has not laughed with many of Rejlander's characteristic heads, or wept—yes, I have seen even that emotional result produced by a photograph (which was not an accident), and it is an important part of my argument that all these emotions arose first in the mind of the photographer, and would never have been originated by the same models in the hands of another photographer.

Of all the attempts made to prove that photography was not an art, and which would have most force, if proved, would be that it showed no evidence of individuality; but, on the other hand, if the possession of that quality were proved, it would be one of the strongest arguments in favor of the admission of photography to the brotherhood of art, for individuality in its products necessarily implies the operation of a directing mind behind the "soulless camera."

The latest of the many attempts to define

the meaning of the word "art" is a very remarkable one. It is said to be "the apparent disproportion between the means employed and the end obtained." And, as an illustration, the following explanation is given, at which, I think, many a practical photographer will smile:

"Admit, for argument's sake, that a photograph reproduces with a fidelity far beyond anything that the hand of man can attain to, it must still be allowed that the means used to attain this end are infinitely more complicated than a few hairs tied to a stick which the artist uses. Indeed, it might be argued that, if *art* is the apparent disproportion between means and end, photography is not art at all, but science. There is no art on the part of the lens when it produces its images; it does so strictly in accordance with natural laws. The developer acts as thoughtlessly as any other chemical experiment, and these are the chief factors in every photograph. It is true, you have one small part to play—you must have the *art* of exposing properly; but even here a few shillings will purchase for you a machine to do even this. I do not admit art in development. Art in development is only called in when the exposure is made without art, and, as I have allowed art in exposure, I cannot allow it here again. With such an infinitesimal part of the

picture the outcome of art, is it honest to call a photograph a work of art?" This curious example of scientific knowledge of art is by Dr. J. K. Tulloch, of Dundee, and was written in the present century. Are we to understand from this singular piece of reasoning that painting is an art because the painter uses "a few hairs tied to a stick"? and does the writer suppose that we claim photography as an art because of its fidelity—that heritage of the youngest amateur?

Some writers get confused between degree and kind. In an article in the *Magazine of Art*, a certain writer, who was once a photographer, endeavors to show that photography cannot become art, because its individuality is limited. That it is more limited than painting has always been admitted—we cannot get so far away from the truth as is the painter's privilege—but it is also admitted that all methods of art are more or less limited, and the amount of limitation is only a matter of degree, not of kind. The limitations add to the difficulty, but do not alter the status.

Let us run back a little and see if we can find a few workers, whose results are totally different from those of their contemporaries, and this invariably. One of the earliest photographers to show genuine art feeling in his

work was Rejlander. He died sixteen or seventeen years ago; yet, among many thousands of photographs, it does not require much experience to recognize a Rejlander. There was nothing in the manipulation to distinguish them except, perhaps, carelessness. It was the mind of the man that was visible; you recognize the man beyond the process. There are still those living who can say, on looking at a collection of old photographs, "This is a Francis Bedford, a Dr. Diamond, a Fenton, a Delamotte, a Le Gray, or Silvy, a Wynfield or a Mrs. Cameron," certainly quite as accurately as an expert in painting would say, "This is a Raphael, or Titian, or a Correggio." Then what becomes of the machine argument?

I will now endeavor to put it another way. Photographs, as I have endeavored to prove, show the mind of the producer—when he has a mind to show—and given two equally gifted photographers, as far as equality can be measured, the one could not produce even a colorable imitation of the work of the other. Neither could dismiss his individuality, let him try how he may. Take two representative men, Rejlander and F. Bedford—neither of these accomplished photographers could have imitated the other. They had both original minds and followed the bent of their genius, and their

hands, as well as brains, showed in every picture.

Among the workers of the present day I could point to dozens of well-known instances, but one or two must suffice. No man's work has been more imitated than that of Mr. Gale. In every exhibition he is imitated in size, style, framing, and signature, yet an expert can decisively say of two pictures, "This is the Gale, and this is the imitation;" he can even distinguish between the imitators, and say, "This is a —, and this is a —."

Then, in a very different style, there are the works of our much-respected President, than whom there is no one I would prefer to see occupy the honorable position which defective health compelled me to decline. Perhaps I am not a fit and proper judge of his pictures, but, without altering my opinion of what a photograph should be, I must confess that some of them have captured my admiration for their beauty and respect for other ways than my own when in good hands. Now, some have endeavored to imitate Mr. Davison, and some have renounced photography in despair, because they could only reach the eccentricity without touching the excellence. It is easy to put the image out of focus, but not so easy to make a picture by that means, and Mr. Davison makes

pictures. It is easy to copy peculiarities, but not so easy to imitate valuable essentials.

While on the subject of our President, may I be permitted to add—for he is now in a public position and open to our shots—that, however straitened his views of the practice of photography as an art may have been at one time, his opinions have constitutionally broadened down, until now the keynote of his teaching is liberty for all.

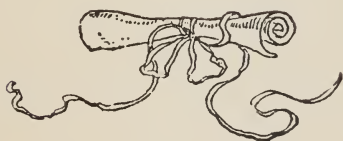
We now come to another proof of individuality. It used to be the practice to insist on anonymity at exhibitions until after the judges had done their work; but this was given up when it became apparent that the judges usually recognized the work of the old hands, and the only nameless ones were new exhibitors. In America—at least, at the Convention Exhibition—the farce of the anonymous is still carried to such an extent that nobody seems to know, officially or otherwise, who the pictures are by until it is too late to be of any use to the exhibitors; and newspaper criticism has to be published without names. For, however the photographs may proclaim their authors, it seems to be etiquette to pretend not to know.

The difference between the works of some of our best photographers and those of the moderately successful can scarcely be due to a

scientific cause, except, indeed, to a reversal of the generally received idea ; for I think, if the truth were known, it would be found that the producers of the indifferent pictures had much more scientific knowledge than those who produce the most artistic effects. I am acquainted with a great many of our photographers, but I do not know one of those to whom we are accustomed to look for the chief ornaments of our exhibitions who has any elaborate scientific knowledge. Indeed the technical methods of many of the best exhibitors are so very simple as to seem quite elementary. They usually take a plate to the make of which they are accustomed, a simple hypo and ammonia developer, a handful of hypo, and a jug of water, and use them properly ; and that is all. They do not bring science to bear even on the exposure, at the expense of a "few shillings." They get on without an actinometer. They feel from experience when their plate has had enough, and an actinometer, however perfect, would only confuse them. But, as they endeavor to put taste, thought, and feeling into their pictures, their works necessarily differ from those of the scientist, and the essence of their art is individuality.

My last word must be a word of caution. Be original, be unique if you can, but not out of

harmony. Individuality goes wrong when it is out of harmony with its surroundings. Eccentricity is very easy, but it does not last. It is open to the meanest capacity, and is often assumed by it; but genius, to be useful, should consist of individuality, backed up by suitability to its environments.



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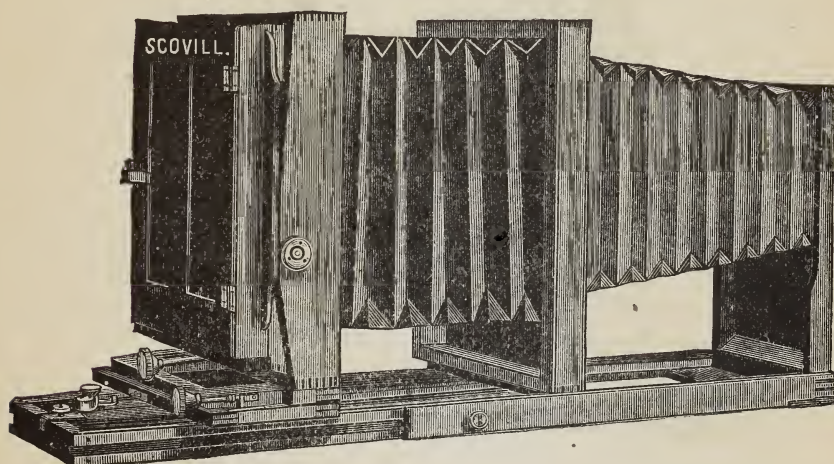
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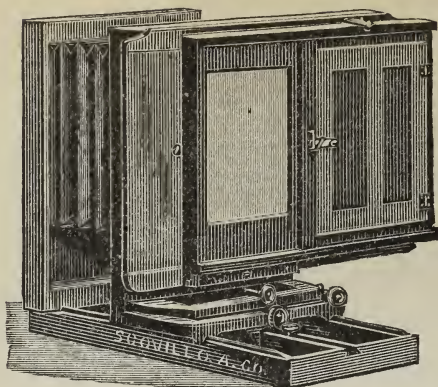


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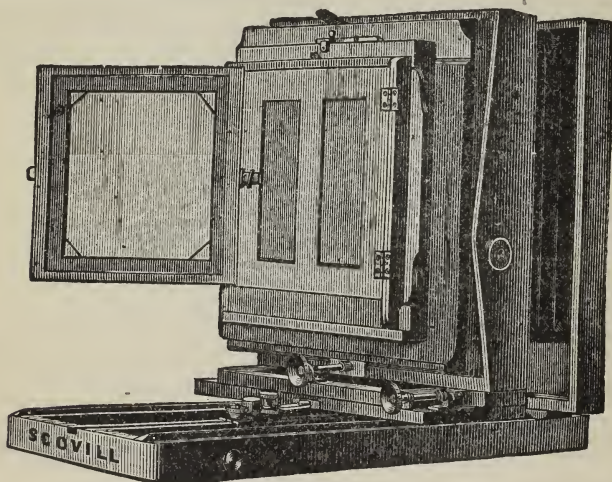


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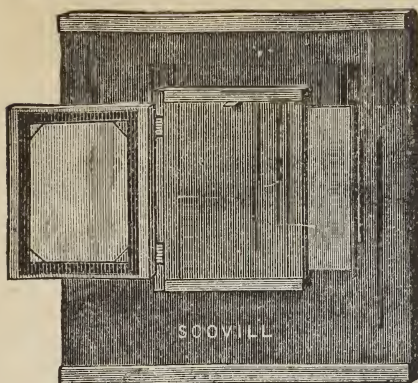
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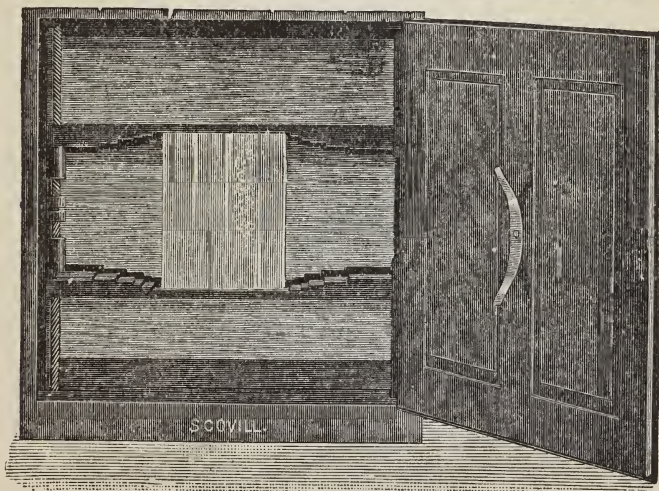
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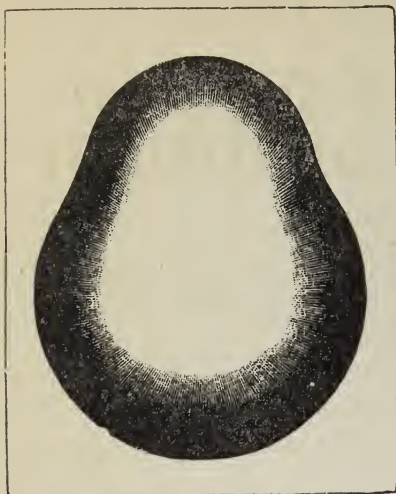
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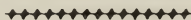
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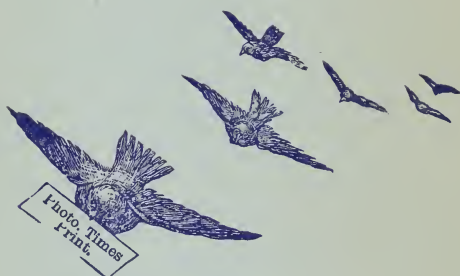
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